IRPP Study

No. 38, January 2013 www.irpp.org

"I Am Canadian"

Challenging Stereotypes about Young Somali Canadians

Rima Berns-McGown

Despite the barriers they often face, including racism and stereotyping, most young Somali Canadians want to be part of Canada, which they see as their home.

Même s'ils doivent surmonter des obstacles comme le racisme et les stéréotypes à leur égard, la plupart des jeunes Somalo-Canadiens désirent s'intégrer au Canada, le pays où ils se sentent chez eux.

Diversité, immigration et intégration
Diversity, Immigration and Integration

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ISSN 1920-9436 (Online) ISSN 1920-9428 (Print)
ISBN 978-0-88645-295-7 (Online) ISBN 978-0-88645-296-4 (Print)

Summary

This study challenges the perceptions that the Somali Canadian community has failed to an unusual degree to integrate into the wider society; that this is the fault of the community itself; and, moreover, that this supposed failure represents a threat to Canadian security because of suggestions that some Somali Canadian youth have been lured to the radical extremism of the al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab movement in southern Somalia, and because some have become involved in drug trafficking and street violence.

Drawing on her previous research and some 40 in-depth interviews with young Somali Canadians, Rima Berns-McGown finds that most of these youth self-identify as Canadian and want very much to be a part of this country, which they see as their home. They also, and not in contradiction, feel strongly Muslim and Somali. Extensive quotations from the interviews provide insights about these multiple identities. To the extent that integration involves the identification of newcomers with their adopted home, most of these young Somalis appear to be integrating well.

But integration is a two-way street: it entails the willingness of new Canadians to embrace their new home and — equally significantly — the willingness of the wider society to lower the barriers to their becoming active and productive members of their adopted home. And in that regard, many young Somali Canadians encounter significant roadblocks that are not conducive to integration or social cohesion. These include systematic, institutional racism on the part of schools, police and intelligence agencies, and the media. In light of the significant challenges the Somali Canadian community has faced, the author's assessment is that its achievements have been quite extraordinary.

Berns-McGown found no widespread or significant support for al-Shabaab or any other organization that threatens the public safety of Canadians, and she maintains that characterizations of the community as disengaged and a security threat are unwarranted and deeply problematic.

The author concludes that social cohesion would be much better served by addressing the specific challenges Somali Canadians continue to face, rather than stigmatizing the community and contributing to the criminalization of its youth. She offers proposals for school boards, law- enforcement agencies, federal and provincial governments, and the media, among them targeted supports for Somali Canadian youth and ways to address institutional barriers and stereotyping. According to Berns-McGown, these measures could both enhance Somali Canadians' inclusion in the wider society and foster a balanced approach to public safety issues within the diverse, diasporic space that is Canada.

Résumé

Cette étude récuse la perception voulant que la communauté somalo-canadienne ait particulièrement échoué à s'intégrer à la société, qu'elle porte l'entière responsabilité de cet échec présumé et, surtout, que la sécurité du Canada s'en trouve menacée du fait qu'une partie de sa jeunesse adhérerait à l'extrémisme radical du mouvement Al-Shabaab du sud de la Somalie, lié à Al-Qaïda, tout en étant impliquée dans le trafic de drogue et la violence urbaine.

S'appuyant sur ses précédentes recherches et une quarantaine d'entretiens approfondis avec de jeunes Somalo-Canadiens, Rima Berns-McGown montre que ceux-ci s'identifient comme Canadiens et désirent clairement faire partie du pays où ils se sentent chez eux. Sans y voir de contradiction, ils s'affirment aussi franchement musulmans et Somaliens. De longues citations tirées des entretiens témoignent de cette identité multiple. Et dans la mesure où l'intégration repose sur l'identification des nouveaux arrivants avec leur pays d'adoption, la plupart de ces jeunes semblent bien s'intégrer.

Mais l'intégration est un processus à double sens : elle suppose la volonté des immigrants de s'ouvrir à leur nouveau pays et, de façon tout aussi déterminante, celle de leur société d'accueil de lever les barrières qui les empêchent d'être des citoyens actifs et productifs. Or de nombreux jeunes Somalo-Canadiens se heurtent à d'importants obstacles — notamment au racisme institutionnel et systématique des établissements d'enseignement, des services de police et de renseignement ainsi que des médias — qui nuisent à leur intégration et à la cohésion sociale. L'auteure estime ainsi que face à l'ampleur des difficultés rencontrées, la communauté somalo-canadienne a fait de remarquables avancées.

En ce qui concerne l'influence supposée du mouvement Al-Shabaab ou de toute autre organisation qui menace la sécurité du Canada, elle note l'absence d'appui général ou significatif à leurs thèses et maintient qu'il est injustifié et fort préoccupant de présenter la communauté comme étant menaçante et repliée sur elle-même.

La cohésion sociale serait beaucoup mieux servie si l'on s'attaquait aux défis que doit encore relever cette communauté, conclut l'auteure, plutôt que de la stigmatiser et de favoriser ainsi la criminalisation de sa jeunesse. Parmi les propositions qu'elle adresse aux commissions scolaires, aux organismes d'application de la loi, aux gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux et aux médias, citons une aide ciblée aux jeunes Somalo-Canadiens doublée de mesures visant à lever les barrières institutionnelles et à combattre les stéréotypes. Ces initiatives faciliteraient l'inclusion de la communauté tout en rééquilibrant l'approche des enjeux de sécurité publique dans l'espace diversifié et diasporique du Canada.

"I Am Canadian": Challenging Stereotypes about Young Somali Canadians

Rima Berns-McGown

Sometime during the night of September 17-18, 2012, a young man died of a gunshot wound in Etobicoke, Toronto. Warsame Ali, the third of four children, was from an educated, middle-class family. His parents are loving and well employed. His mother, Habiba Adan, speaks four languages. She was educated in Somalia, the United States and Canada, and she holds an MA in economics and a BSW from York University. Warsame had finished high school and taken courses at Seneca College. At first, he thought he wanted to be a policeman so he could help to improve community policing, but in time he decided that he was better suited to social work. He was working in Montreal to earn tuition money, and he had come back to Toronto for the weekend to renew his OHIP card. His parents live in a middle-class neighbourhood in Vaughan, where they had moved when Warsame was in middle school, and where he finished high school. Warsame had gone back to his old neighbourhood to visit some friends for a few hours. He was on the verge of achieving his dreams, but he still had connections to the world of his childhood. He ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time, and he never came back.

The perception exists that the Somali Canadian community has failed to integrate into the wider society to an unusual degree; that this is the fault of the community itself; and, moreover, that this failure represents an alarming and growing threat to Canadian security in the form of young people who have been lured to the radical extremism of the al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab movement in southern Somalia, as well as those who have become enmeshed in drug trafficking and street violence (see Mills 2012; see also Schmidle 2010; Schwartz 2010, 2011; and Wingrove and Mackrael 2012).

Based on in-depth interviews with young Somali Canadians, all of whom either arrived in Canada as refugees or were the children of refugees, this study challenges that perception: many young Somali Canadians feel very Canadian and want very much to be a part of this country, which they see as their home. To the extent that integration involves the identification of newcomers with their adopted home, most young Somalis appear to be integrating well. There is within the community or among its youth no widespread or significant support for al-Shabaab or any other organization that is a threat to the public safety of Canadians. But integration is a two-way street. It relies on both the willingness of new Canadians to embrace their new home and — equally significantly — the willingness of the wider society to lower barriers to participation and to ease the process of becoming a productive member of one's adopted home. Many young Somali Canadians encounter significant roadblocks erected by the wider society that are conducive neither to integration nor to social cohesion.

This study maintains that, while the Somali community faces extraordinary challenges, its achievements have been yet more extraordinary; that characterizations of the community as disengaged and a security threat are both unwarranted and deeply problematic; and that Canadian social cohesion and wider-society self-interest would be much better served by assisting in the identification of the specific challenges the community has faced and by finding solutions rather than stigmatizing the community and criminalizing its youth.

Finally, this study offers a set of proposals that would, if followed, go a very long way toward meeting these challenges and changing the perception of the Somali community as a security threat.

Methodology

Between 2007 and 2011, I interviewed a sample of young Somali Canadians about their perceptions of identity and belonging. In their late teens and early-to-mid-twenties, this group is mostly generation 1.5: that is, most of its members were born in Somalia before the exodus in the late 1980s and early 1990s; they arrived in Canada before their fifth or sixth birthdays; and they have been socialized entirely within a Canadian, diasporic context.

The analysis that follows draws on these interviews, 42 in total, most of them one-on-one. All were conducted in Toronto with young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. I approached participants using snowball research methods and seeded the snowballs in different ways to ensure a broad cross-section of respondents.[1] I interviewed 20 men and 22 women from a range of backgrounds. They included: young people who were outwardly observant of their faith and those who were not; those who were in PhD and graduate programs, in university, or in trade-based post-secondary programs and those who had dropped out of high school and not yet settled on a future course; those whose fathers and mothers lived in the same household and those who were raised by single mothers, grandparents, or other relatives; those who lived in social housing projects and those who lived in middle-class neighbourhoods; those who had been back to Somalia to visit as teenagers or young adults and those who had not; and those who described having encountered a great deal of racism and Islamophobia growing up in Canada and those who said such encounters were minimal or nonexistent. Interviewees were drawn from the west, centre and east of Toronto. Their names and any identifying details have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

I was interested in talking to these particular young people because I wanted to explore how their sense of self and identity had altered in comparison with that of the teenaged newcomer Somalis whom I interviewed in 1995. The 1995 interviewees were preoccupied with determining how to be Muslim and Somali in Canada and what it meant to be Canadian in that context.

This is the third extended set of interviews I have done with members of the Somali community in Toronto (see Berns-McGown 1999, 2007). I do not consider myself to be "studying" Somalis in any kind of ethnographic way. Rather, I consider these interviews — every one about integration into the wider society — to be windows through which to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Canada as an adoptive home and diasporic space.[2]

The questions that I asked and the way I formulated them were informed by classes that I teach in diaspora studies at the University of Toronto and by my interactions with hundreds of young men and women in this age group, the majority of whom are second generation (therefore born in Canada) but include generation 1.5 members in their number, as well as young people who arrived in Canada as immigrants in their teens and others whose families have been Canadian for hundreds of years.[3]

I know from those interactions — and from both informal conversations and formal class exercises — that questions of identity are paramount at that age, and that young people who have

complex and multiple identities tend to pay particular attention at this stage of their lives to how these identities mesh and to how they can be balanced. And, indeed, my respondents, regardless of socio-economic status or education, were all keen to explore these topics and their relationship to the wider question of integration into Canadian society — and how, or whether, the experiment we've collectively embarked upon is working.

I asked each respondent three questions: "What does it mean to you to be Somali?" "What does it mean to you to be Canadian?" and "How do you combine these two sets of identity?" The questions were the start of a conversation that, obviously, differed from person to person.

The result is that these interviews shed a fascinating light on the Canadian approach to diversity, on what is working and what we could be doing better, on where we are failing and on some of the assumptions we need to correct if we expect our approach to keep working. The interviews have strong policy implications, which politicians of every political stripe and inclination would do well to heed. These implications have nothing to do with the political left or right. Motivation is unimportant here. The lessons are that certain conditions in the wider society encourage integration and others discourage it, and enlightened self-interest, not ideology, would dictate that it is sensible to pay attention to what works and to adjust course accordingly.

Before providing some background on the Somali Canadian community, I need to define two terms. The literature on "diaspora" has exploded in recent years, and the definition of the term depends to a great extent on the academic background and focus of the writer (see, for example, Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Braziel Evans and Mannur 2003; Bramadat 2005; Carment and Bercuson 2008; Sheffer 2003; Brubaker 2005; and Brah 1996). For my purposes, to be "diasporic" means to live in an imaginative space where multiple connections and multiple narratives affect one's sense of self as an individual and as a citizen in a world of increasing intersections. It means to have connections to an imagined place of origin — imagined because one does not need to have been born there for it to have power over one — as well as to the adoptive home. By "imaginative space" I do not mean one that is imaginary and therefore unimportant, but rather a powerful space whose significance, and the confusion it sometimes generates, derives from the individual's understanding of complex and multiple storylines (Berns-McGown 2007-08).

"Integration," as I define it, has two distinct but interdependent and interconnected parts. The first, which I call "internal integration," involves an individual's weaving of a belief set acquired in the birth country or parental household with that of the adoptive home in an ongoing renegotiation of identity and reevaluation of beliefs, attitudes and perspectives on everything from food to clothing to friendship to religion. The second part, "external integration," involves the willingness of the adoptive home to open up and to promote participation of the newcomer in every aspect of civic life — the political, the economic and the social (Berns-McGown 2007-08). It involves making sure that everything from schools to hospitals to the job market (at all levels) to the political system is as accessible to newer Canadians as it is to older ones. The more open the wider society, the more receptive to weaving will be the individual and, by extension, the community.

In other words, integration is a two-way street: it necessarily involves the opening of the adoptive society to the perspectives of newcomers and the (re)negotiating of identity on the part of the diasporic individual and community as well as the wider society.

Background: The Somali Canadian Community

There was effectively no Somali community in Canada prior to the late 1980s. The first wave of Somalis, almost all of whom were refugees, arrived in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the breakdown of civil society and the outbreak of war in Somalia. The community grew fairly rapidly to between 40,000 and 50,000 people in Toronto, and another 20,000 in Ottawa, by the mid-1990s; today, it is about double that number.[4] Although Somali Canadians live primarily in Toronto and Ottawa, they are also present in smaller cities such as London, Waterloo, Calgary, Saskatoon, Edmonton and even Inuvik.

Most Somalis who arrived in those early years were traumatized by what they had witnessed and experienced leading up to and during the civil war.[5] Loss of homes, employment and property; sexual assault, rape and kidnapping; murder, torture and imprisonment: they had seen or suffered through all of it (Elmi 1999; Jorden, Matheson, and Anisman 2009).

The first wave of Somalis who made it to Canada was composed of people of means. They had been the professionals, the educated classes, the business people of Mogadishu and Hargeisa. This is not surprising: it took money, knowledge and planning to transport their extended families to Toronto. It was often a journey that took place in stages — via Kenya or Ethiopia, and then through the way stations of Rome, London, New York City or Buffalo. Almost all of those first arrivals were refugees; they had lost everything in the breakdown of civil society and in the passage to safety.

When they arrived, they were further horrified: they found themselves in cold places, met by a barrage of hostile media and suspicion (see Christmas 1993; Stoffman 1995). They were assumed to be looking for an excuse to freeload on Canadian generosity; they were assumed to prefer "First World" Canada to "Third World" Somalia. They were bewildered by these assumptions and perplexed that anyone would think that they had willingly traded a life of sunshine, fresh food and relative wealth for a cramped existence in the grim, grey apartment complexes of Etobicoke and Scarborough.

They were viewed — and portrayed in the media — as strange people with strange habits. They were depicted as unfamiliar with technology and Canadian transit systems. They ate with their hands. They circumcised their daughters at the age of eight or nine. They had multiple wives. They were both black and Muslim. They were secretive and did not talk to non-Somalis. They were keen to live off Canadian taxpayers and not pay for what they took. They were prone to violence (Christmas 1993; Stoffman 1995).

Women frequently found themselves the trailblazers. They bore the brunt of these racist and Orientalist assumptions, expressed not only in the media or during casual street incidents, but also in the world views of the social service personnel, administrators and bureaucrats with whom Somalis had to deal on a daily basis. There were many single-mother households in the

diaspora, for a number of reasons: because extended Somali families did not organize themselves according to Western ideas of nuclear family units; because these families were large and frequently made their way piecemeal across the Atlantic; and because stress or violence tore these families apart over the course of the move and in their early years in their adoptive homes.

For all of these reasons and more, women most often found themselves keeping their families together, finding housing and income, finding education for their children, dealing with the complex legalities of their precarious position in Canada and fighting with bureaucrats. Until 1991, for instance, refugees were not eligible for social housing in Toronto. It was Somali women who fought the battle that changed that rule (Mohamed 1999).

Importantly, Somali women found themselves fending off the tidal wave of social change that threatened to sweep their children away and render them unrecognizable to their elders. In Somalia, they had not concerned themselves much with questions of identity or religion. They had not had to. The vast majority of Somalis are Sunni Muslims. They are not as homogeneous a people as they are sometimes portrayed, but clan divisions have not always plagued them. Until Siad Barre and his divisive and irredentist politics caused the breakdown of civil society and the subsequent exodus into the diaspora, Somalis had little reason to be particularly conscious of what it meant to be Somali and/or Muslim, or to spend much time on defining it.

Coming to the West, though, meant addressing these questions. Somali women, in keeping with their responsibility for their children's well-being, were preoccupied with what it meant to be Somali and Muslim in the diaspora, and with passing their identity and heritage on to their children, who they feared were in danger of losing these things in the flood of societal demands competing for their attention.

In the process of becoming conscious of what it meant to be Somali in the diaspora, the women — and this was a movement led by women — began to redefine and reevaluate the role of Islam in their lives. They began to read the Qur'an and to form study circles to discuss and analyze its meaning for their new lives and its implications for how to live in the diaspora. They did this because it helped them to deal with their own trauma and to figure out how to keep their children's identity strong. In other words, it enabled them to identify what they considered essential as they transformed into a diasporic community and gave them tools to manage their extended reactions to trauma.

This phenomenon was described over and over to me by the Somali women with whom I spoke in 1995, and it was described again and again to me by their children in this most recent set of interviews. Much of the scholarly literature on the renegotiation of Somali youth identity tends to downplay this aspect of their diasporic lives, apparently either treating the shift in their practice of Islam as unimportant or regarding their practice as "traditional" (see, for example, Forman 2001). I emphasize this point because it provides important context for understanding the current situation of the Somali community and the "radical extremism" of some of its sons.

The transition was not led by imams outside the community; it was led by Somali women themselves, and it was a response to the trauma of moving into a hostile diaspora. When

they described it to me at the time it was happening, they said that it helped them to find meaning in their lives and a measure of peace amid chaos, and it provided them with a tool to ensure they would not lose their children to a cacophony of religious choices — or, worst of all, to atheism.

There were, it is true, a couple of Somali Islamist groups in the West at the time that the women were undergoing this transition. Both of them — al-Ittihad al-Islamiya and al-Islah — had been formed by Somali political dissidents who, having fled Somalia when it became too dangerous, made their way to Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Sudan and thence to London, Toronto or other major Western cities. In the early 1990s, they advised Somalis on how to live in the West as Muslims, but most women did not trust them. They suspected them of clan bias, among other things, and preferred to work matters out among themselves in their study circles, practising *ijtihad* — or independent reasoning — in judging how to read the Qur'an and its exhortations on how to live.

As I have written elsewhere (Berns-McGown 1999), this was no static notion of textual Islam to which they turned without thought. Rather, they debated and transformed it as they took on new practices. Yes, they began to wear the *hijab* — or the *jilbab* — and, yes, they began to pray more assiduously. But they were ever aware of the environment in which these things were happening, and they redefined what was acceptable, how and why, as they worked through the transition.

At the time, their children were sceptical. They described to me how, back home, they would not have been told to cover themselves, to read the Qur'an or to pray five times daily; they were impatient with these requirements and — understanding of their mothers' pain and unwilling to increase it — they indulged them. At the same time, they were undergoing their own identity redefinition, a process that their younger siblings have continued.

The Interviews: Somali Youth Speak about Identity and Belonging

I explored three overarching questions with my respondents: "What does it mean to you to be Somali?" "What does it mean to you to be Canadian?" and "How do you balance these two sets of identity?" In addition, our conversations ranged across various pressing issues, including schooling, racism and other social barriers, and why young people would be attracted to al-Shabaab. The interviews from which I quote here are representative of the spectrum of responses I received.

The first question elicited a variety of answers. Being Somali means many things to this cohort, including speaking the language, eating the food, being a good storyteller and having a sense of belonging to a community.

> *Anywhere you go, you know someone, and someone knows your mom. You feel a sense of belonging.* (Zeinab)

But religion was, consistently, what they described as important, whether or not they practised it in any sustained way:

> *I don't wear the scarf properly and don't pray all my prayers but think I understand my religion, and it's something I truly want to do. My mom is always on me to wear my* hijab *properly and to pray all my prayers.* (Asha)

> *What it means to be Somali for my parents is what they lived — so obviously it's different for me because my lived experience is different...For me being Somali is really to be proud, to mean what you say and say what you mean...To celebrate your culture but also to be curious about other people...Religion the way my mom raised me was never forced: it has to come from you. Religion is about influencing people to be good, about persuasion, but it's never about conforming without consent. None of us have gone away from that faith.* (Hamda)

> *I think of myself first as Muslim. That's what I am. Then would come Somali, but it's not that I'm not nationalistic. It's just something you are. Somali culture is Islamic. It's been a part of us for so long. Even if you're not religious you won't eat pork and you will cover up.* (Layla)

> *I am a Muslim person, then a Somali and Canadian. To me religion is the primary part of my identity; religion and culture are interwoven together.* (Abdurahman)

> *I am Muslim first, then Somali. In every culture there are people who follow Islam. Being religious is not about being more Somali; if anything Somali cultural practice interferes with religion.* (Farhia)

> *I have a religious heritage from grandparents, which I've held on to. Out of my family I'm the most religious by leaps and bounds. I practise differently from them; I'm a lot more observant and aware of it. I'm more conservative than my brothers. I follow religious doctrine and apply it to certain life situations. I use it as a moral compass. I've always done this, even in high school — where there were almost no other Muslims.* (Osman)

> *I consider myself very religious, although I don't cover or pray. I think of being Somali as being equivalent to being Muslim.* (Amina)

Some respondents emphasized that their thinking about religion and their identity had evolved over time:

> *Being Muslim is a big part of being Somali. My mom became religious when she came to Canada. She never forced the* hijab *on us; we picked it up on our own. I wore it for six years in elementary school and then I didn't in junior high. But when I came into university I started thinking a lot about who I was and what I believed in and what was in my heart. I've always been a Muslim, but I started thinking I should show it and show it to other people. I felt surrounded by all this propaganda and people not understanding what Islam is about...For me it was also a spiritual change. It's not just about wearing* hijab. *It's a lot more than that. I started praying and stopped partying and clubbing, partly because in Islam it is wrong and partly because I realized that I don't enjoy myself in those situations.* (Nura)

> *Being Somali is my faith, Islam. It is a crucial part of who I am, the core...We don't care about tribe and I don't speak Somali very well, but we care about Islam...I chose to wear the* hijab *in grade 3. My dad was mad about it. My mother was the one who held the faith. She wanted us to.* (Hawa)

> *I was raised without religion, but gradually I became aware of religion and today I consider myself very religious. Islam keeps me on the straight and narrow. Being Somali means being Muslim for me.* (Mohamed)

> *I never thought much about it until September 11. I was 12 then. It was a major point in my life. People in my neighbourhood started questioning who I was and I started questioning myself. Before that, being Muslim was never seen as anything in particular — okay, whatever — but after that, you are a terrorist? The media wasn't very nice. That's what pushed me to get more into my religion. I started taking classes, going to the* masjid *more often.* (Layla)

Young Somali Canadians often maintain that Islam is the bedrock from which they draw their views on social justice and women's rights.

> *I know I don't need to dress this way [wear the* hijab*], but it's my choice. I'm expressing my identity. I don't tell you not to wear a miniskirt. Islam is dynamic. It grows. It incorporates everything*

> *it comes across. My mom's generation started practising when they came here as a way of saying they were different…Now my aunts and relatives see me as way too Western. But for me everything is grounded in Islam — women's rights, feminism — it's all grounded in Islam.* (Hawa)

> *I do consider myself to be religious. I don't wear the* hijab *and I do pray, but not all the prayers. I distinguish between the Qur'an and the Hadith; I don't blindly follow the Hadith. It's important to me to read the Qur'an and to make my own decisions as to what it means. My family has weekly Qur'an discussion nights where we consider different questions…For instance, I believe that the Qur'an asks women and men to dress modestly, but that doesn't necessarily mean* hijab*…I developed a strong sense of being Somali when I was an adolescent. I didn't have it as a child. My sisters make fun of my Somali. I don't know the proper words for things. But when I heard about the current state of my country I wanted to make things better. Are we not Muslims? Do we not want to make things better?* (Sadia)

> *My dad asks, "What makes you different from the girl on the street? Is it because you sometimes wear* hijab*?" As much as I deny it when I speak to him, he's right. Balancing is really hard. I'm 18 and the last thing on my mind is learning about Somali culture. Religion, that's different. You always live by religion, but our generation is forgetting about our culture.* (Anab)

Being Canadian for these young people means having opportunities that they wouldn't have had in Somalia. But, most fascinatingly, and almost universally, they said that being Canadian means to be accepting of others, even if you don't agree with them. They made this assertion over and over again, regardless of their background, socio-economic status or level of religious observance.

> *Canada has given me an ability to think outside the box, to question, to see things for what they are and not just to accept what I am told.* (Sahra)

> *Canadians are more accepting.* (Deqa)

> *Canada makes me flexible.* (Ali)

> *Being Canadian means having opportunity and being able to do whatever I want to. Being Somali, there's a limit. I'm in a room with four walls and I'm trapped. Being Canadian, there is no end. I can be whatever I want. Me being Canadian teaches me to question, investigate. I'm okay with my friends doing things differently, even if I wouldn't do them.* (Nura)

> *Canada is more accepting — more friendly, more open — more accepting of different people of different backgrounds.* (Layla)

> *Being Canadian means being open and accepting. If I lived elsewhere I would have a narrower view of life and ideas.* (Farhia)

> *Being Canadian is being accepting of other cultures and understanding that just because someone is different it isn't bad. It is a more cosmopolitan understanding.* (Osman)

> *To be Canadian is to be open-minded and socially accepting. It is more accepting Islamically.* (Abdurahman)

Importantly, this respect for others includes respect for people of other religions and other ethnicities, as well as for people who self-identify as gay, lesbian or queer.[6]

> *If I want to be respected for who I am, I have to respect someone else for who they are, even if I don't agree with them.* (Hawa)

> *My liberalness is Canadian — my open-mindedness — the fact that I will talk to anyone — that's definitely my Canadian side. I've started to notice this over the last couple of years, especially after I came back from the United States. Everyone in Canada is free to be who they want.*

> *Being Canadian gives me tolerance that Somali culture doesn't. I'm willing to learn about other people and other religions. My Canadian side makes me willing to listen. I may not agree with you, but I will listen.* (Asha)

> *Being Canadian is being respectful of difference and not pushing your own beliefs onto people who have different ideas…being aware of how people were different and that being okay…not wanting to hurt people who believe different things. Being Canadian also means being able to speak up and say what you believe, even if that isn't expected or appreciated.* (Abdullahi)

> *Being Canadian is being allowed to be who you are and celebrating other people's cultures. It's being a part of an experiment where you're curious to see how it's going to come out, but it's really trying the whole peace-on-earth thing where you can have people from different religions living together: Can we live amicably together? That's what being Canadian is. Being celebrated for who you are, but learning so much about everybody else. I have Indian friends, for instance, and I get to celebrate their culture here in Canada. It's respect that helps you so you don't lose who you are. People are getting it right and I see it working on the streets. It's politicians who are messing it up, and academics who say it isn't working.* (Hamda)

At the same time, respondents did not always believe that other Canadians saw them as Canadian or accepted them as such, and they described encountering both colour racism and Islamophobia. This racism took different forms, including teachers assuming that they would not be able to cope with university or succeed as professionals.

> *I was discriminated against many times by teachers and told I would never amount to anything, even in high school. There are three strikes against me here: being black, being a Muslim, being a woman.* (Sahra)

> *One friend of mine was with a group of guys. Some of them were on probation so they weren't supposed to be out. The police came up and started questioning them and because she was with them, one of the policemen grabbed her up and shook her. She said, "You can't do this; I have rights." He said, "What rights? I could take you in the back of the car and f— you, and then we'll see what kind of rights you have. No one would say anything." This happened recently, two months ago...How much filth could you have in your soul to talk that way?* (Hawa)

> *In middle school my mom sent me to Islamic school for three years and I encountered a lot of racism from Arabs there: the Arabs were white and I was characterized as a slave. I wasn't able to be friends or go to their houses. It was rough. It made me hate these Canadians — they saw me as black and not Canadian. The slave trade was not discussed at Islamic school. I was called "Bilal" — the freed slave. It was actually a terrible experience. I hated the white Canadians at that point — the Arabs. My identity got defined as black against the world. This had never happened in elementary school.* (Ali)

> *Then in high school, on the first day of high school, the math teacher walks into the room and picks out the four black kids in the class and says, "You, you, you and you…you better leave my class. You're going to fail." She didn't know who we were. It was the first day of grade 9. It was just because we were black. We all stayed in her class, and two of us did very well, but she failed the two others.* (Yusuf)

> *A lot of ignorant people live here; they think they're better than everyone else. You've gotta respect different cultures. Everyone is good in their own way.* (Hassan)

> *It wasn't until I went to U of T that I started running into racism. Growing up I didn't. I come from Scarborough. Caucasian kids were the minority in my school. There was no one, dominant group. Everyone came from somewhere else...Away from that neighbourhood I face racism. It's always older white men, not usually women. And Islamophobia — someone just now told me to go to hell, just five minutes ago, on my way to meet you here.* (Hawa)

> *My sister became a lawyer — she went to U of T and then got a scholarship to an Ivy League university in the US. But in high school, when she told her teacher what she wanted to do, the teacher said, "You? Be a lawyer? That'll never happen."* (Sadia)

> *In grade 9, [the] gym teacher said, "Do you need to wear that thing [the* hijab*] all the time?" and embarrassed me into taking it off. Later I felt bad and thought God would be mad at me. She shouldn't have asked me that. I felt bad and limited and wasn't sure I could wear it at school at all.* (Sadia)

> *After September 11 I was really hesitant about being Canadian. Before that I was really into being Canadian, but after that I felt I didn't belong to this country. I felt really confused. Everywhere I go I don't really fit in. Before 9/11 I played hockey. I was so into the Spice Girls. I played all the games in school. I stood up for national anthem. I made essays on what it means to be Canadian. I saw myself as [a] normal Canadian kid. Then 9/11 happened: my Canadian-ness was questioned because of being Muslim, not because of being Somali. It became important to me to be part of an* umma *that has no nationality.* (Layla)

Despite the fact that they were not always accepted as Canadian, many respondents displayed a dual Canadian-Somali identity.

> *My Canadian identity comes out when I travel. You never feel you're going to be completely accepted as Canadian, but when you travel you are.* (Deqa)

> *I am not Canadian alone or Somali alone. I am both.* (Nura)

> *After 9/11 I can't deny that I'm Canadian, but sometimes I still don't feel at home because people make a point of making you not feel Canadian.* (Layla)

> *It's very important to me that I am seen as Somali as well as Canadian. To me there is no contradiction between these things. I feel very connected to Canada and I am very proud of being Somali as well.* (Sadia)

> *Being Canadian means very much to me. Without Canada I don't know where I would be. It feels good to be Canadian. To be honest, all I know is Canada. I feel very Canadian. I have lived here my whole life. It's been more a question of me reaching for Somalia, me looking for Somali culture, because, of course, I am Canadian. I don't have to explain being Canadian. I do have to figure out how to be Somali, trying to hold on to Somali culture.* (Ahmed)

> *I could never see myself moving to Somalia. I don't speak Somali. I find it easy being Somali and Canadian — the diversity — I love Toronto. I couldn't live in a place with only one race, even if they were all Muslim. I love being in a place with people who look and speak differently from me.* (Hawa)

Respondents' varied descriptions of their self-perception are significant: they do not have simplistic perceptions of their identities. Which aspect of their self-perception as Muslims, as Somalis and as Canadians is highlighted at any one time depends on context.

> *Being Somali makes me adaptable, and Canada makes me flexible. I am both. It's like I have a shirt of multiple fabrics and designs. That's what makes me unique. It's what makes me Canadian, and it's also what makes me Somali.* (Ali)

> *I'm me at all times. I wear different hats at different times. My personality doesn't change, but I have a healthy dose of having a multiple personality.* (Yusuf)

> *My identity is contextualized. I'm just me, until I'm marginalized. I gravitate to the Muslims or Somalis or Canadians, depending on the context.* (Osob)

> *As I grew older, being Somali became more important — when I graduated high school and got into university. Being Canadian is just as important to me.* (Nura)

> *Canada is part of me now. I can say with pride, "My country doesn't do this" [attack Iraq]. I do attach myself to being Canadian. It's become second nature to almost forget I wasn't born here.* (Sadia)

I can't deny the fact that I'm Canadian. It's me, but it's not my main identity. I still do get those [racist] reactions, unfortunately, but I can't deny something that I am. It's just me, so I've been more accepting of who I am. (Layla)

I am more connected to Canadian culture. (Farhia)

Within the Somali community we've seen a shift from clan-based culture and we've lost a lot of conservativeness. There is a dichotomy: there are two types of Somalis. There are Somalis who are entrenched in Canadian culture and will do Canadian customs like go to clubs, drink, have premarital sex. On the other side, there are very conservative young people who are very closed to those things. But there is a growing role model of Somali youth who are conscious of both their Somali background and Islam, as well as their Canadian-ness, and therefore do not need to adopt Caribbean hip hop culture. (Osman)

I am a Muslim person, then a Somali and Canadian. I see myself brought up Canadian, don't see Canadians as "others" but as fellow citizens. I am culturally a Somali who is Canadian. (Abdurahman)

Hamda's response is a common one among young second-generation or generation-1.5 Canadians, regardless of diasporic community: It is the return to the homeland that emphasizes the extent to which one has become Canadian.

When I'm in Canada I'm not sure I'm Canadian. But when I'm in Somalia I'm so Canadian. I really believed for a long time that the pinnacle of being in the diaspora was this war between hanging on to what your family came with and trying to take part in your environment. So when your family tells you you're Canadian it means you've given up on your cultural identity. I'm starting to think it shouldn't be seen like that. It shouldn't be this guilt feeling of you're not being Somali and that's a bad thing. You shouldn't be trapped by your history. But stories are who we are and they comfort us in a way. Now I'm embracing Canada and I hope one day to be able to be a Canadian Somali without feeling divided and without it being a war — and without it being a struggle. (Hamda)

I am effortlessly both Somali and Canadian…I find it funny that frequently Somalis don't take me to be Somali and have to ask what I am. (Abdullahi)

I don't know how to be Somali. I am more Canadian than Somali. Doing Canadian things, that's my balance. (Hannah)

The way I balance the two is when I'm at home I pray, I speak my language, I adapt to the Somali culture. When I'm outside, I adapt to the Canadian culture, speaking English. When you're at home, be who you are, where you come from; when you're outside, adapt to the culture of where you're living. (Hassan)

I look Somali, but I consider myself Canadian. I listen to Canadian music. I pray sometimes, not always. It's hard to be a good Muslim in this society. I try to blend in. At the end of the day I'm going to make a living here in Canada. I'm not going to go home to Somalia, there's war there. I'm going to adapt to this country. I'm going to have kids here. Honestly, I don't think my kids are going to be Somali. No offense, but half the kids I know don't know how to speak Somali. Who's going to teach my kids? (Zeinab)

I really don't balance it. The only person I speak Somali with is my mother. I go to school with Canadian people, so…I consider myself more Canadian than Somali, honestly. My mom learns from me. (Nasra)

I do consider myself more Canadian — what I wear, how I live, what I do. But I am also trying to learn Somali. I want my heritage to survive, I want my kids to know Somali. I'm also trying to learn Arabic. (Safiya)

Self-Identifying as Both Somali and Canadian

Not surprisingly, the process of becoming Canadian involves a gradual combining of an individual's perception of what it means to be Somali with what it means to be Canadian. That change happens fairly rapidly with regard to language and food. Younger people, at least, tend to gain English and retain their Somali — depending on the extent to which it is spoken at home.

Clan markers are noted, but they lose their meaning — or their meaning is wilfully ignored — because they are irrelevant in the Canadian environment and seen as disruptive to it; in addition, they were partly responsible for the descent into chaos and, ultimately, the loss of the homeland.

However, for the Somali Canadian youths I interviewed, religion was a particularly important marker of identity. Most were preteens in September 2001, and 9/11 struck home for them with particular force. As a number of them noted, their inclusion in the Canadian community was suddenly questioned: they were made to feel like outsiders and could no longer take belonging for granted. They believed that this happened because they were Muslim and not because they were Somali. But because they saw the two as entwined, the connection was reinforced, and, if anything, more emphasis was placed on their religious difference. This was true even for young people who did not practise their religion openly.

Many reported racist encounters with teachers at school, especially encounters in which their ability to succeed was questioned. In every case, the respondent reported feeling hurt and scarred by this and described the powerful impact of the encounter on his or her sense of self and possibility. Respondents also reported that education was important to their families. Young people living both in marginalized neighbourhoods and wealthier ones spoke of their parents' desire for them to obtain a good education in Canada and to make the most of the opportunities afforded them. Education was a priority at home, so when a teacher assumed that they could not succeed, it was a significant blow. In retrospect, respondents saw these assumptions as racist and having nothing to do with their actual ability and everything to do with how the teacher perceived them.

Interviewees had no doubts about their ability to be Canadian and to embrace what it means to be Canadian, which they characterized most pointedly as the ability to accept someone who is different, even if they don't agree with that person. Speaking of their childhoods, they said they never considered what being Somali meant. As children, they did not feel different from their non-Somali peers; they learned to skate, to love hockey, to fit in. What they did point to, again and again, was that they were not always seen as Canadian, particularly after 9/11, and their reaction to this was to question their ability to belong.

That, in turn, caused them to look inward and elsewhere. In light of this, one can understand the pull of hip hop, rap and Caribbean culture, particularly in marginalized neighbourhoods and social housing projects. These projects, as others have written, are difficult places to grow up in.

As Ahmed said, "Crazy neighbourhoods will make you crazy. I will do anything to make sure my children never have to grow up in one." He continued:

> *Music played a big role. Music is something people downplay, but they should think about it more. Rap and hip hop is about drug dealing, women, clubbing, having nice clothes, people talking about selling drugs and shooting guns when really they are living in a nice home and selling their music, but you have this kid on the other side who's trying to live that lifestyle they're hearing and it's easier to get into that than it is to get out. When you're 15-16, you're not thinking that really this guy isn't a drug dealer — he's selling music — and you're living in the neighbourhood he's describing so you're trying to fit into that lifestyle. When you're in school, you have your iPod and you're just not really thinking about that hour you're in class or what they're teaching.* (Ahmed)

A few respondents had been caught up in street gang life and had managed to extract themselves from it. A couple of them had turned to religion to help with this transition. Others had — with some difficulty, and with the help of supportive parents — gradually found new friends, finished high school and moved on to other pursuits.

> *A lot of people I knew were in gangs or doing drugs. I said, "What kind of path is that?" and I isolated myself from them. I have a small circle of friends. They all have the same path as me. It really started three or four years ago. I used to ponder death and dying and didn't like where I was. The question changed my life.* (Abdurahman)

> *I decided not to be part of a gang and to hang out with a better crowd. Religion was a way out for some, not all. Some obviously found that religion helped them. They became more calm, more chilling. The rest just didn't want to be criminals or want that lifestyle. It's hard to get out once you're in, though. Your parents kick you out. Then the only way you can pay the rent is to sell drugs. It's really hard. I had to change high schools and get new friends before I could go back and finish and change my life.* (Ahmed)

> *For a while I hung out with the yo-yo boys, but I got pulled back by religion. It keeps me on the straight and narrow, got me back into school and university. Today I am a serious person, interested in law and politics.* (Mohamed)

Challenges

After the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006, some young Somali people living in the United States and Canada began to return to Somalia to fight for al-Shabaab.[7] This raises a number of questions: What could explain their decision to return? Could it have been predicted? What does it mean? Is this the beginning of the radicalization of the whole community?[8]

Embedded in the notion that this community has failed massively to integrate is the idea that somehow being Somali eclipses being Canadian, and it is impossible to be both at the same time. My young respondents, regardless of their socio-economic status or level of opportunity, indicated that this is far from the case. The same ability to bridge the gap is apparent in the young people whose parents had them schooled in Toronto's wealthiest neighbourhoods as in those who grew up in the marginalized, "crazy neighbourhoods" of Jane and Finch or Rexdale.

At the same time, it is clear that they responded to the barriers to belonging by seeking acceptance as black youths and as Muslims. Hodan is an example of someone who became more religious due to the rejection she experienced after 9/11:

> *Is there a conflict between being Muslim and being Canadian? There is some conflict between being Muslim and living in a non-Muslim environment. I need to pray. And I have issues with people thinking that I am forced by my dad to cover. I feel more free than my Western friends. I feel sorry for them because of the lives they have to live and their need to please some guy and their need to*

> *get some guy. I lost some friends when I became more religious. Their other life is drinking, partying, sex, and that's where we have differences of opinion…Sometimes the ignorance I encounter is really funny. Someone said to me once, "You're not in Islamia, you don't need to wear that." Islamia? Really?! I want to hang on to something that means something to me.* (Hodan)

Another theme that runs through interviewees' comments is reaction to the foreign policy of the United States and, to a lesser extent, of Canada. Such reaction tended to come from the more educated respondents:

> *I try to shut out that Canada is [fighting] in Afghanistan. As a Muslim, they're my brothers and sisters. I try not to think about it…The more crap the West does in the East and this world, the more it's pushing the youth to al-Qaeda.* (Hawa)

> *I wasn't really proud of being Canadian when Canada supported the US in its foreign policy in Afghanistan and in Africa.* (Sadia)

> *The US government, the CIA, seem to do anything they can to keep Somalia down.* (Abdurahman)

> *We're very disturbed about what's going on in Somalia [and about the West's role in encouraging Ethiopia to invade in 2006]. Religion creates homogeneity…Religion governs your whole life. We need to be able to approach the government to discuss politics in a holistic way — with the Somali community united.* (Osman)

Hawa was the only one to argue that youth were being pushed to a point where they would fight for al-Shabaab, although she did not specifically name the group. Other respondents, including those who knew young men or women who had gone to Somalia for that purpose, and even those who were outwardly very religious, were derisive of the organization:

> *It's a tragedy how Islam is portrayed, but Shabaab is a whole other thing. I am strict about Islam; I follow the Sunni Hadiths, the path of the Prophet, peace be upon him. But it seems like Shabaab is a distraction. For my father and his generation, Shabaab is like the devil. Some people take advantage of, say, a young girl who was a partier and becomes an overzealous Muslim. In the wrong hands, she is vulnerable. I know someone whose sister went and phoned to say she was there. They don't even get to fight. They get married to a Shabaab fighter and have babies and are housewives. I don't think they know what they are getting into when they go.* (Abdurahman)

Support for al-Shabaab, then, does not appear to be widespread in this cohort or, according to them, in the community as a whole. A number of respondents, in fact, argued that becoming a drug mule in Alberta was similar to naively going off to fight with al-Shabaab in Somalia (Bennett 2010). While the aims are obviously very different in each case, both cases represent the responses of young people who have not been able to figure out how to belong meaningfully to the wider society who face racism and Islamophobia, and who are not sure how to create meaningful lives for themselves in a Canadian context.

Most of those who decided to fight with al-Shabaab were young men. Girls, more often than boys, were likely to finish high school and pursue post-secondary education.[9] Noting this, many of my respondents said that one significant problem that young men face is a lack of male role models:

> *Women are out working, trying to do something; they're the breadwinners. But the men do nothing. They chew* qat. *Girls see their mothers working and trying to better themselves. Men just sit in cafés, not wanting to better themselves or to make a better life for themselves. Sons don't have a role model.* (Hawa)

> *Lots of guys have moms who are working all the time but Tim Hortons dads, so they roam around and there is no authority.* (Abdurahman)

> *Their moms can't be everywhere all the time. They try to raise them well, but when they go out they are exposed to a whole different group of people and lifestyle. But the problem is also community housing. I would like to see more people try to find a way out of that. I lived in community housing since '93 and, honestly, it's not somewhere I would like my kids to grow up, so as soon as I find a good-paying job I will move out of there.* (Ahmed)

Fathers suffered a tremendous loss of dignity and respect when they lost the jobs and societal position they had held in Somalia. The "Tim Hortons dads" to whom Abdurahman referred, and the men who "do nothing" but "chew *qat*," as Hawa described them, are men who held positions of influence and authority in Somalia and were devastated by the move to countries that took them in but did not consider it worthwhile to invest in their retraining. Many chose not to take the demeaning and precarious jobs available to them — parking lot attendant or security guard — and, instead, to discuss politics in cafés.

Moreover, the mothers, while heroic, still bear the scars of traumas that have never been dealt with and about which they will not talk. My young respondents were all aware that their parents had been through tremendously painful times, but they also said that their mothers would not talk about what had happened, would not share the specifics of what they had seen before they left Somalia and would not even describe what they had lived through during the difficult, multistage journey to Canada. The young women, in particular, recognized the pain in their mothers and wished they could help them to heal.

Integrating Despite the Challenges

This set of interviews is a continuation of the set I conducted in 1995 and 2004. One sees how integration, in the sense of a weaving of "back home" perceptions with those of the adopted country, is progressing. One also sees how challenges created by the wider society impede the second, equally important portion of integration.

Canada's Somali community has had to face tremendous challenges. Like the generation of post-Second World War Jews who arrived in Canada traumatized by the war and the Holocaust, Somalis arrived as refugees in the grip of a collective trauma. Unlike that generation of postwar Jews, however, the Somalis had no previously established diasporic community to guide them, to help them retrain, to teach them English, to find them housing, to help them cope with the racism in the wider society or with the trauma. They have had to do it alone. As members of a new refugee community, they did not have the help of Somalis who already knew the system and how to advocate for their welfare within it. They are not comfortable seeking Western-style therapy, and they have had to fight battles, well documented elsewhere, with regard to legal status, access to affordable housing, education and dignified work (see, for example, Aw-Osman 2012; Abdulle 1999; Danso 2002; Israelite et al. 1999). They have had to learn new parenting styles.

In the meantime, their children have faced their own tremendous challenges at school. Like everyone else, they want to fit in with their peers. They were labelled "black" for the first time, and they had to grapple with what that means. Somalis did not think of themselves as "black" before they

arrived in the West. "Black" is not a skin tone, but rather a category of social standing that carries a burdensome history of oppression, judgment and association. They had to redefine themselves as black and Muslim in new contexts. They often met with racist assumptions, even on the part of their teachers, other black Canadians (in the form of Islamophobia) and some Arab Muslims.[10]

The schools bear significant responsibility for the high current dropout rate of Somali boys. Often, children dealing with post-traumatic stress were streamed into classes for slow learners or children with behavioural problems, which meant that they got neither the psychological help they needed nor adequate instruction in the curriculum. Parents who were new to the country didn't understand the coded language of report cards, or that there was a difference between being "promoted" to the next grade and being "placed" there (the latter meaning that the school had moved the child to a higher grade to keep him with his age group, even though he had not mastered the material he needed to master for promotion). This caught up with the students when they entered high school. By that time, it was too late for the boys, who were frustrated, impatient and unable to keep up — they had simply missed too much.[11]

On top of all of these challenges, most of the community found itself wrestling with the issues and stigma associated with community housing and marginalized neighbourhoods, which exacerbated the trauma, the racism and the transition difficulties. Living in a marginalized neighbourhood carries real risks for children, and boys, in particular. Those risks have translated into major problems — abilities unrealized; the criminalization of boys, which would not have happened had their parents managed to find jobs and housing in other neighbourhoods; the creation of outsider-status cycles — that have prompted media portrayals of Somalis as outsiders who have not integrated easily into the Canadian body politic.

We need to make it clear that people who were highly educated were often forced, particularly in the early years (critical years for their children's education), to move into public housing by chronic unemployment and underemployment. This is, in part, the effect of Canada's ongoing failure to recognize foreign credentials.

Finally, media portrayals that consistently focus only on violent deaths or terrorist connections create a narrow narrative, which becomes integral to the wider society's understanding of the community, which in turn feeds the perception of teachers, prospective employers, police officers, and policy-makers and politicians at all levels of government. In homing in on a relatively small number of individuals who cannot speak for themselves (as by the time they are the subjects of reporting, they are dead or in Somalia), these portrayals evoke a community characterized by gun or gang violence, or the violence associated with al-Qaeda-linked fanaticism (see, for example, Wingrove and Mackrael 2012).

Let's return, for a moment, to Warsame Ali. At the beginning of this study, I wrote about his coming from a middle-class family and wanting to be a social worker. That is true. He also had an outstanding charge of marijuana possession against him and was due to stand trial in November 2012.

Let us bear in mind that this was not a charge of heroin, or crack cocaine or ecstasy possession. Marijuana is an illegal drug in Canada, but smoking it is a widely practised middle-class pursuit. Even the President of the United States no longer feels the need to claim that he "never inhaled."

Warsame was charged with possession of marijuana for the purpose of trafficking. If you are caught with more than about an ounce of marijuana, you can be charged with possession for the purpose of trafficking, even if you bought it for your own use. Many regular users buy it in bulk — four ounces or so in a large freezer bag.[12] Like cereal, it is cheaper that way.

The media stories about Warsame's death did not talk about his middle-class background or about the fact that he wanted to be a social worker. They said that he was "known to police," and they talked about his marijuana charge (see, for example, Poisson 2012a). We need to remember that Warsame had been charged, but not convicted. We also need to think about how the narrative changes when we consider the facts indicating that Warsame was a young man who could have come from any middle-class Canadian family rather than just the facts implying shady dealings and the inevitability of violence.[13] My purpose here is not to argue that Warsame was an innocent, but rather to point out that the way in which we perceive his life and death is a function of the facts we are given, and that narrow, stereotyping descriptions of young Somalis reverberate far beyond specific cases.

I want to urge a very different way of understanding the Somali community. Once one understands what Somalis have had to deal with, one must recognize the tremendous strengths of this community and the challenges it has overcome. Somali youth are encouraged by their parents to take advantage of the educational and other opportunities available to them in Canada, and most are graduating from high school and pursuing some form of post-secondary education.[14] Samiya Abdi of the new Somali organization Aspire to Lead, which is in the process of collecting statistics to demonstrate precisely how many successful young Somalis Canada has produced, estimates that dozens of young people have become health professionals (doctors as well as nurses), lawyers, engineers, PhDs, teachers and social workers. These are the stories the media fail to report, but they are the more interesting ones. Despite the enormous barriers they face, young Somalis are succeeding.

Most importantly, as the interviews make clear, these barriers have not prevented most Somali youth from feeling very Canadian or from being very committed to Canada. The worst of the barriers — the widespread assumption on the part of police forces and teachers that Somali boys in marginalized neighbourhoods are inevitably headed for trouble — was taken by my respondents to be a function of the "crazy neighbourhood" and not endemic to Canadian society as a whole. Based on the interviews, we can say that there is no widespread endorsement of al-Shabaab or of the few who have gone to join that group. To that extent, the Somali community cannot be said to be a haven for radical extremists.

It is important, then, to examine why there is such a disconnect between the public perception of the Somali community and the reality. The public perception — as exemplified in the media, but also as framed by policy-makers and security agencies — is that the Somali community has failed to integrate into the West, and that this failure has facilitated the radicalization of its young people. Some believe that the community has been unable to prevent the radicalization and has perhaps even supported it.

The reality — in Toronto, at least — is that the vast majority of young Somalis, despite the enormous challenges facing their community, feel deeply connected to Canada and find a way of balancing their complex identities; that there is no widespread or significant support for al-Shabaab or the few who have gone to join it; and that those who have gone overseas for that purpose are viewed as unfortunate and misguided. This deep connection is the single most important marker of successful integration: without it, social cohesion and public safety are severely compromised; with it, challenges can be met and problems solved.

It seems to me that there are several reasons for the disconnect. First is the fear on the part of North American security agencies that al-Shabaab has the potential to serve as a training ground for *jihadis* whose targets are the subways and public spaces and institutions of North America. Over the course of 2011, I was invited to speak about this research with representatives of security agencies in Ottawa, Toronto and Washington, DC. The fear that Shabaab-trained operatives will return to Canada or the United States with the intention of doing harm was voiced in more than one of these meetings, although it was also acknowledged that this remains an unsubstantiated fear and that there is no evidence that this is a goal of any of the Canadians (or Americans) who have thrown in their lot with the organization.

A number of respondents spoke about the reasons al-Shabaab had gained a reputation among some Somalis as a potentially positive force in the region — particularly, that the group opposed the US-sponsored invasion by Ethiopia. (This, however, was before al-Shabaab's problematic response to the recent famine, among many other issues). Not a single one of my respondents argued — or knew anyone else who would argue — that al-Shabaab was the answer to post-9/11 Islamophobia or any other difficulties the Somali community was encountering in North America.

This is a critical distinction, and one that we need to begin to make more assiduously. Al-Shabaab was seen as a political answer to foreign intervention in Somalia at a particular point, not a religious solution to difficulties that Somalis are encountering in the West as Muslims. The group is generally considered — as is al-Qaeda — to be a distortion of Islam, not its model.

Moreover, Canada has porous borders and its people have multiple allegiances. Diasporic Canadians have in the past supported, do currently support and will continue to support overseas causes that other Canadians view with scepticism, discomfort or outrage. Diasporic Canadians supported the African National Congress (ANC) when it was a Mozambique-based rebel group that embraced arms, and Canada considered Nelson Mandela a terrorist. Diasporic Canadians supported the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in large and small ways during the Troubles in Ireland. Diasporic Canadians leave Canada to fight for a foreign army, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). In this context, the Toronto-based HESEG Foundation — founded by prominent Canadian business people Heather Reisman and Gerry Schwartz — gives academic scholarships to those who, as "lone soldiers," do not have family in Israel to support them once their army service is over.

In each of the three cases of overseas allegiances I have just mentioned, the Canadian government and public opinion may not always have approved of Canadians' participation in these foreign causes, but in none of the cases did disapproval translate into a widespread assumption that

that participation implied a failure to integrate into Canadian society or a desire to set off bombs in Toronto. My point here is not to compare the IDF, the IRA or the ANC to al-Shabaab; it is to argue that in a world of complicated identities, connections and allegiances, we must develop more sophisticated ways of understanding precisely what is going on before we decide that, as a senior representative of one security agency characterized it to me, a community is "pathological."

The second reason for the disconnect between Canadians' perception of the Somali community and the reality is that there is a misunderstanding of how integration works: we want immigrants and diasporic Canadians to feel nothing but allegiance to Canada, and we want them to feel it immediately and without complications. The answers given by young Somalis in these interviews jibe completely with the hundreds of personal essays that my mostly second-generation students from all over the world have written for me on the complications of being diasporic in Canada. All consistently emphasize two facts: they feel Canadian but struggle to balance other connections and cultures as well; "back home" is a strong influence in their lives, and they are under very real pressure from their parents not to "lose their culture." This is as true of young people from Poland as it is of young people from Pakistan or from Somalia.

Integration takes time, and people who are balancing those connections and who run into barriers to their participation in the form of any kind of racism will react to it not by feeling less Canadian, but by feeling that they are being told they do not fully belong in this country. We need to be careful how we interpret this. It doesn't mean that these people do not believe themselves to be Canadian; it means that they are reacting to the slap, which they perceive as saying, "You are an outsider here." The distinction is subtle but important, and it imparts a clear policy implication: We need to systematically remove barriers to participation, and we need to document and systematically eradicate institutional racism.

Importantly, we must not mistake the nature of integration in Canada for that in the United States and Britain (see Berns-McGown 1999). Policy-makers and security agencies in the US and the UK assume that what they are facing in London and in Minnesota must be what we are facing in Toronto. This assumption is wrong and misleading. While I did not intend for the interviews in this study, unlike the 1995 ones, to compare and contrast the UK and Canadian communities, informal conversations with British Somali youth indicate that there continue to be stark differences between Canadian and British political cultures with regard to integration — and that these differences are translating into very different degrees and perceptions of connection to the wider adoptive society (Berns-McGown 1999 ["London and Toronto," and Conclusion], 2005).[15] Similarly, to integrate into the US is not to integrate into Canada, and we should not assume that what applies in the one country necessarily applies in the other.

As I have written elsewhere, the political cultures surrounding integration in the UK and the United States are different from that in Canada. Although a detailed exploration of these differences is beyond the scope of this study, the essence of what is sometimes called "Canadian exceptionality" lies in a widespread understanding within the country that Canadian identity does not need to be expressed in a narrow British-, French- or Aboriginal-derived manner, and that a diasporic connection to elsewhere does not detract from "Canadian-ness." Multiculturalism as a set of policies, in its

Canadian formulation, has its disadvantages, but because it has become a kind of Canadian creation myth (one of the factors widely seen to define Canada), Canadian lawmakers and policy-makers have a greater tendency to work toward economic and social inclusion than their counterparts in the UK or the US. However significant the challenges, and despite the institutional racism and Islamophobia, the relationship with the state that newcomers to Canada have is a fundamentally different one from that of newcomers to the US or the UK (Berns-McGown 1999 ["London and Toronto," and Conclusion], 2005; Abdullahi 2012).

These differences affect life for newcomers at every socio-economic level. They have an impact upon how and whether boards of directors of companies and institutions become diverse, on attempts to diversify workforces and even on aspects of prison life. One simple but stark example of how that different political culture expresses itself was on display at a 2012 Conference Board of Canada meeting on security and youth radicalization, in which an American law-enforcement official declared that in his state's prisons, no one is allowed to wear headgear of any kind. He added, "and if you will not remove it voluntarily, we will help you."[16] He was apparently unaware of the significance of forcibly removing a religious woman's *hijab* to conform with state prison regulations. In Canadian prisons, women are permitted to keep the *hijab* — a head covering has been designed for prison use in collaboration with an imam.

The third reason for the disconnect is a lack of appreciation for the particularly daunting set of challenges that the Somali community has had to face. An analogy demonstrates my point. Nathan Englander is a Jewish American short story writer whose latest collection (2012) attempts to unpack the conundrums of a people who carry deep within their collective memory and self-understanding the trauma of the Holocaust and a long history of persecution, even at a time when Jews are enjoying unprecedented levels of acceptance and integration in the wider societies in which they live, particularly in North America. Communities that have suffered a collective trauma do not easily recover from it just because the acute stage is over. If the story of anti-Semitism teaches us nothing else, it teaches us that prolonged trauma instills a profound sense of existential anxiety, a sense that the diasporic space may never be truly safe, a sense that only by reestablishing "home" in a nation of one's own can one achieve equity and belonging. The Jewish community's experience in Canada is instructive. Prime Minister Mackenzie King and the bureaucrats he appointed to key immigration positions routinely made anti-Semitic public statements in explaining their refusal to grant refuge to Jews. After the Holocaust, from which a deplorably small number of refugees were granted a safe haven, Canada continued to discriminate against Jewish refugees and routinely limited or refused admission to Jews living in European displaced persons camps (see Abella and Troper 1983; Knowles 1997, 133). Jews have a long history of being accused of divided loyalties and lack of commitment to their diasporic homes.

Canada's position on Jews has changed, and as a nation we have come a long way in terms of how we integrate immigrants and minorities and how we think about who is Canadian and what it means to be Canadian. We need to be honest about our ongoing proclivity to suspect the newest of newcomers of being inherently disloyal and harbouring a desire to harm their adopted home. And we need to admit that the problem is mainly, as it has been throughout our history, the lens through which we see newcomers, and not the newcomers themselves.

Rather than concentrating on the Somali community's difficulty in meeting its particular challenges and assuming that this indicates a lack of commitment to Canada, policy-makers and the wider society should determine what we can do to support the community in its quest to belong. It is to this question that I now turn.

Proposals for Supporting Canada's Somali Community

The Somali community in Canada is already well on the path to full integration, but we in the wider Canadian society can do more to support it.[17] We can do this by having school boards ensure that their teachers and principals never mistake the effects of trauma for bad behaviour requiring discipline and never make limiting assumptions about students' abilities based on their language skills, skin colour, religion or background. School boards must also ensure that parents understand the decisions that teachers make about their children and that parents are aware of the avenues open to them to advocate for their children; parents need to be informed as well about how to proceed if they disagree with a teacher's decision. Boards should hire more Somali Canadian teachers (a good number of Somali young people have graduated from teacher-training programs but have not been hired by school boards with large Somali student populations).

We must support Somali women in their efforts to create community-appropriate therapies for mothers and other women suffering from prolonged and untreated post-traumatic stress disorder and to preserve and record first-generation Somali Canadian stories.

We should create a coalition of Somali, Muslim and wider-society partners to work with Somali Canadian youth in schools in order to provide support with school work; avenues for after-school sports and art and music lessons; opportunities (at the high school level) for networking, summer jobs, internships and outdoor experiences; and workshops and advice on post-secondary education and supplementary opportunities. Coalition partners should, first and foremost, include: Somali organizations and parent groups, such as the Somali Youth Association of Toronto, founded in 1992, and the newly created Positive Change; Muslim religious and community organizations (mosques and community centres); wider-society social service organizations and other nongovernmental organizations; and private corporations and smaller companies.

Law-enforcement and policing agencies need to reevaluate the way they calibrate threats and community connections. Specifically, they need to better understand how racist policing can hinder integration, particularly in marginalized neighbourhoods, as racialized youth see themselves marked and treated as criminals-in-the-making from prepubescence.[18] Police must also reexamine their role in contributing to the criminalization of young men in marginalized neighbourhoods, and those who work in detention centres must acknowledge that they help to transform young people into criminals by permitting other inmates to "educate" them and force them to join inside groups to avoid being sexually assaulted or beaten. Law-enforcement and policing agencies should also take concrete steps to counter the problems that they create by: keeping young people of out of detention centres whenever possible (seeking other avenues to solve problems); teaching officers to recognize when they are charging young people who might, in other neighbourhoods, be let off with a warning to their parents; and working with school and community partners to find solutions for teenagers that, whenever possible, do not involve incarceration or criminal charges.

The RCMP and CSIS should undertake community consultations, not to tell the community what they do, but to listen and to get advice on how they might do their jobs without creating the sense among Muslim and Somali Canadians that they are being targeted or harassed. Both the RCMP and CSIS have serious community relations problems, which are not just the result of such bad missteps as the Maher Arar rendition. They stem from individuals' stories of feeling targeted and mistrusted. Canada's Muslim communities do not feel that they are seen as partners in preventing radicalization — they believe that they are, as communities, the targets of mass investigations (Helbah 2010). This is an issue that goes far beyond racial profiling and extends into institutional mindsets that assume a community tolerance for radical violence when there is no evidence of it.

The RCMP and CSIS, as well as the Canada Border Services Agency and other security agencies, need to understand that these mindsets — which are as old as Canada itself but have been exacerbated since 9/11 — contribute to the problem of alienation and therefore do not help the agencies or the communities assist youth who are confused about their identity, who feel that they are not fully recognized as Canadians, who are thus unsure that they can live meaningful lives in this country, and who, as a result, seek meaning elsewhere.

If policy-makers and security agencies are serious about eliminating, or at least reducing, any threat from disaffected youth with Canadian passports, then governments at all levels should participate in a whole-of-government approach to helping the Somali community confront its challenges and to ensuring that the barriers to participation in Canadian society are eliminated.

Within the Somali community are many strong, capable leaders — men, women and young people with enthusiasm and energy. If we, as the wider Canadian society, want community assistance in helping alienated youth, we need to treat communities as partners, not as targets.

The media, including the CBC and the *Globe and Mail*, need to think carefully about how they portray racialized and minority communities, and about how some of their portrayals inspire sympathy in their audience while others inspire vilification and stigmatization; they must consider the consequences of these portrayals for the particular community and the wider society.[19] The Somali community tends to be portrayed through two simplifying lenses, both violent: that of drugs, guns and gangs; and that of radicalized, extremist, al-Qaeda-linked terrorism. The media need to recognize that these portrayals are responsible, in turn, for creating or exacerbating the mindsets and actions of educators, police officers and potential employers who, wary of Somalis because of what they have read and seen in the media, treat them as underachievers, young criminals-in-the-making, potential terrorists or untrustworthy individuals.

The media should work with community and journalism school analysts to understand how their coverage continues to create distortionary and discriminatory portraits of racialized and minority communities. Furthermore, the media should consult with a variety of Somali leaders on issues affecting the community and not rely on outside "experts" or commentators.

Finally, the federal and provincial governments should design policy with an awareness that the provision of adequate social services to new Canadians has a direct relationship to integration:

social services that create openings for newer Canadians always contribute to integration and, as such, to increased safety and security for Canada. The federal government should also create a task force to investigate the ways in which institutional barriers prevent or hinder inclusion of Somalis in schools and in the workforce, and thus hinder the integration of the community. The task force should then recommend institution-specific ways in which these barriers can be dismantled. The federal government should recognize that it is in its own interest to ensure that the recommendations are followed and that barriers to inclusion are eliminated.

The task is significant, but by no means impossible. If completed successfully, it would solve real and perceived problems and serve as a blueprint for an inclusive approach to public safety in the diverse, diasporic space that is Canada.

Conclusion

Canada has a long history of mistrusting its newcomer groups. Somali Canadians join a parade of immigrant groups that have been made the target of official or institutional discrimination because of a combination of their particular ethnicity and the politics of the day.

The Somali community has indeed had to face formidable challenges, but it has also made astonishing progress. The story of its move to Canada and its integration into Canadian society is a universal story of the indomitability of the human spirit. It is a story of strength and courage in the face of daunting odds, terrible racism and Canada's only partly opened arms. It is a story, particularly, of the inspirational strength of a generation of heroic women, and of their legacy: their many children who are working hard to succeed and then help their community.

Various governments have apologized, more or less officially, for their past wrongs and periods of blatant discrimination against different communities, but it is high time that we recognize when and how discrimination happens and figure out how to stop it — when it is a current problem, not decades later. Canada's Somali community is not radicalized or pathological, and it is not a haven for radicalized youth. Somali Canadian integration is, in fact, a story of extraordinary success in the face of formidable challenges. We should support this community as it contends with these challenges. In this study, I have suggested a number of partnerships that would respect and support existing community strengths and provide wider-community extensions to aid integration, and, in particular, to assist Somali youth to create meaningful lives for themselves in Canada.

Canada and Canadian policy-makers would do well to listen to the wise Somali youth interviewed here. At its heart, being Canadian means respecting people who are different, even if one doesn't agree with them. The fact that these young people, however difficult their road, identify that characteristic as the single factor that most says "Canada" to them means that this collective experiment of ours has the capacity to work and to be transformational. It is a profound statement, but only if we follow through on its potential. If we do not, it will remain a wish and a pipedream, and every one of us will be the poorer for it.

Acknowledgements

I would like, first of all, to thank the many young Somali Canadians who took the time to talk honestly with me. Thanks, also, to the two anonymous reviewers and the IRPP's France St-Hilaire for their very thoughtful comments, and particularly to Leslie Seidle for his suggestion that I publish this study with IRPP and for his gentle but rigorous shepherding. I am especially grateful to Habiba Adan, Faduma Mohamed, Khadra Hussein and Maryam Ali for their input and their trust. Any errors or omissions are mine alone.

Notes

1 Snowball interviewing results in a wide and representative range of perspectives if the snowballs are seeded in different geographic, religious, educational and socio-economic circumstances. I started with a number of young people I knew in different sets of circumstances across the Greater Toronto Area and asked each whether he or she knew other people who might be willing to talk to me. One of the reasons it took four years to complete the interviews is that it took me that long to ensure that I had a sufficiently full range of perspectives — including those of young people who had not finished high school and had been in trouble with the law, and those of young people who were deeply religious. I did not speak with Warsame Ali, although I did talk at length with his mother, Habiba Adan, after his death.

2 My ability to conduct this most recent set of interviews rested on the fact that I have a history of writing respectfully about the experiences of Somalis in Toronto and London. Many of my respondents, therefore, knew that my book *Muslims in the Diaspora: The Somali Communities of London and Toronto* (1999) had been widely accepted by its Somali readers as a compassionate and accurate portrayal of the communities' experiences in the few years following their arrival in Toronto and London. Those early interviews simply could not have been conducted by a Somali interviewer because, by definition, that interviewer could only have come from a subclan, and the community was so riven in those early years that no one from outside that subclan, whichever one it was, would have agreed to speak with me. Rather, the perspective and the car that I brought to the interviews was that of a sympathetic, empathetic and knowledgeable outsider. I have the same interests as my respondents: to determine the elements of a socially just, diverse society and to record the ways in which the withholding of those elements causes a withholding of allegiance and a turning inward, but, conversely, how their presence allows for a flourishing of the weaving we call integration.

3 Generally speaking, then, my respondents knew three basic things about me: that I have a history of writing respectfully about the stories I am told; that I am not Muslim but am sympathetic to the difficulties and challenges of being Muslim and practising Islam in North America, particularly post-9/11; and that I teach diaspora studies at the University of Toronto at Mississauga. In addition, they knew that I am Jewish. It is worth mentioning that in all the dozens of interviews I have done over the years, I have never once encountered anti-Semitism. In the 1995 interviews, respondents all wanted to know my religion, and upon being told, the universal response was a relieved, "Oh, you are one of the People of the Book" — they saw this as creating a bond between us.

4 These numbers are estimates, since the census significantly underreports community populations.

5 The civil war is generally understood to have emanated from clan tensions seeded and exacerbated by the policies of Mohamed Siad Barre, president of Somalia from 1969 to 1991, and from the struggle for control of resources and power after his ouster.

6 Respondents were asked specifically whether their respect extended to people with different gender identities and sexual preferences.

7 Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin, or "the Mujaheddin youth movement," was a splinter group of the Islamic Courts Union, a group of *shariah* courts that had come to rule most of southern Somalia until it was ousted by Western-backed Ethiopian troops in 2006. The transitional federal government, which took its place and which was seen to be propped up by foreigners, did not succeed in gaining legitimacy and, in the immediate aftermath of the Ethiopian invasion, al-Shabaab was recognized as the strongest defender of Somali nationalism. This fact has been exploited by al-Qaeda, which has channelled money and expertise to the group, and which formally allied itself with the group in 2012. Al-Shabaab has focused significant effort on bolstering its reputation through English-language videos and by attempting to recruit fighters from the West, including Europe, the United States and Canada (see Marchal 2011, 2009).

8 The number of young Canadians who have gone to join al-Shabaab is relatively tiny — an estimated two to three dozen. Security organizations' concerns, in both Canada and the US, have centred on the possibility that Shabaab camps might be used to train young people to come back and commit terrorist acts in North America (Bell 2011).

9 The school dropout rate of boys as compared with that of girls was reported anecdotally by all my respondents, and it came up continually in conversations with adult Somali community leaders. It is corroborated by Brown (2008).

10 There is a voluminous literature in the academic and popular presses on racism and Islamophobia in Canada's schools, workplaces and streets. To cite just a few examples: Margles and Margles (2010); Hamdon (2010); Young (2008); Buckner Inniss (2007); and Codjoe (2001). On Somalis and the Toronto District School Board, see Mahamed (2010); and Abdi (2012).

11 For these insights, I am grateful to Faduma Mohamed, Habiba Aden, Khadra Hussein and Fowzia Mahamed.

12 Personal interview with a regular marijuana user and purchaser, whose name, for obvious reasons, I am withholding. He is of Scots-Irish descent, well educated, well employed and middle class.

13 An exception to the rule, and a much-welcomed contrast, was the *Toronto Star* article published a month after Warsame's death, which painted a more human portrait of the young man and his family (Poisson 2012b); in this article, the police are quoted as saying the charges against Ali were "relatively minor."

14 While the dropout rate of male Somali-speaking students in the Toronto District School Board is higher than average, it is slightly lower than those of Portuguese-speaking students and Spanish-speaking students, and the dropout rates of all three groups have been improving slightly. The dropout rate of students born in East Africa is significantly lower than those of students born in the English-speaking Caribbean and in Central/South America and Mexico (Brown 2008). The dropout rate of female Somali students is not higher than the average for all students.

15 For instance, a recent set of interviews with Somali youth in Britain reported that, "Of the 25 youths interviewed, an overwhelming 84 per cent mentioned they did not feel a sense [of] belonging in British society" (Abdullahi 2012, 64).

16 Meeting of the Conference Board of Canada, Centre for National Security, November 2-4, 2012, Mississauga, ON. The Chatham House Rule prohibits me from disclosing the speaker's identity.

17 In this section, I combine my own analysis with that of a group of female Somali activists called Positive Change — in particular, Faduma Mohamed and Habiba Adan. The analysis of the specific problems is a blend of mine and theirs. The policy recommendations that I have formulated seem to me to flow from that analysis.

18 There is a voluminous literature on the negative effects of racial profiling on affected communities. See, for example, Tanovich (2004); Ryberg (2011); and Bou-Habib (2011).

19 There is an enormous literature on this process. Readers can begin with Mahtani (2001); Fleras and Lock Kunz (2001); Karim (2003); Harb (2008); and Hay (2012).

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About This Study

This publication was published as part of the Diversity, Immigration and Integration research program under the direction of F. Leslie Seidle. The manuscript was copy-edited by Mary Williams, editorial coordination was by Francesca Worrall, production was by Chantal Létourneau and art direction was by Schumacher Design.

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To cite this document:
Berns-McGown, Rima. 2013. *"I Am Canadian": Challenging Stereotypes about Young Somali Canadians*. IRPP Study 38. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

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